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THE MYSTERIOUS DOORWAY

BY

A.T. Sadlier

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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

"IT IS ALL BEAUTIFUL, BUT I COULDN'T STAY, BECAUSE MY MOTHER NEEDS ME."

THE MYSTERIOUS DOORWAY.

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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

PAGE

THE MYSTERIOUS DOORWAY 7

CHAPTER II.

THE CHILDREN AT HOME 15

CHAPTER III.

MARJORIE'S VENTURE 23

CHAPTER IV.

MARJORIE INSIDE THE DOOR 32

CHAPTER V.

DICK AND HIS MOTHER GO IN SEARCH OF MARJORIE 39

CHAPTER VI.

MARJORIE'S MOTHER GETS A LETTER 47

CHAPTER VII.

MARJORIE BEGINS TO EXPLORE 55

CHAPTER VIII.

PAGE
THE LETTER 61

CHAPTER IX.

COUSIN LUCY GETS A CLEW 67

CHAPTER X.

WHAT MARJORIE FOUND IN THE HOUSE..... 75

CHAPTER XI.

DICK REMEMBERS 86

CHAPTER XII.

"THE PRETTY CHILD" 94

CHAPTER XIII.

MARJORIE SEES SOME ONE 103

CHAPTER XIV.

COUSIN LUCY'S STORY 113

CHAPTER XV.

MARJORIE COMES HOME 123

CHAPTER XVI.

CONCLUSION 131

THE MYSTERIOUS DOORWAY.

CHAPTER I.

THE MYSTERIOUS DOORWAY.

A GIRL and boy stood before the doorway and looked at it, as they had done many times before. For it was a constant puzzle to them why it should be there, although it never seemed to be used by any one. So far as the children knew, not a soul had ever passed in or out of it.

"I am sure no one ever goes in," said Marjorie, wrinkling her brows to a frown in the effort to think. She had a strong, resolute face, that Marjorie, eyes deep-set and forehead protruding somewhat. It was plain that she was born to lead, just as the fair-haired boy beside her was destined to follow. He

was her brother, tall for his age, with a well-shaped head, to which his hair was closely cut. His blue eyes were obscured by glasses, which gave him the appearance of a student.

"I am perfectly sure that no one ever goes in that door," repeated Marjorie.

"But if they come out," said Dick, with something of awe in his tone. Marjorie was startled for an instant; then she replied, less confidently than before:

"I don't think they ever do."

"In the night, perhaps," said her brother, "when the streets are very quiet and the stars are very bright in the sky."

Dick was quite carried away by the picture he had conjured up, and Marjorie's imagination, less quick than the boy's, caught a spark from his. After a breathless pause, she whispered:

"Come away, Dick."

And seizing his hand she hurried him from the spot. Though it was early afternoon, the image Dick had called up was so uncanny that the children walked quickly away from the haunted neighborhood, pursued by phantoms of forms that might be

in the habit of coming out silently under the stars.

The mysterious doorway stood in an old-fashioned part of New York. It was between two large houses, which jutted out on either hand. These houses were of brick, which had once been of very bright red, and they had steps and facings of white marble, which gave them an unusual appearance. The doorway itself was of slate gray. It seemed to have been made in a wall, and had three gray steps leading up to it. When the children had gone a few blocks Marjorie suddenly turned in her impulsive fashion.

"Let us go back," she said. "It was silly to run away in broad daylight."

"But if the door should open and some one should come out," objected Dick.

"Why should it open to-day?" shrewdly observed Marjorie. "We have stood in front of it every day for ever so long, and it has never opened, even the least little bit."

Dick, who seldom disputed anything with Marjorie, walked beside her towards the spot they had so suddenly left.

"Besides," said Marjorie, "I wish the door *would* open."

"Oh, Marjorie!" said Dick, aghast.

It was a gray morning, overcast somewhat, though the sun came out every once in a while, with flashes of almost unearthly brightness. Just as the children had reached the fascinating spot once more one of these flashes fell across the steps and rested upon the doorway.

Dick and Marjorie held their breaths. Were they asleep and dreaming! Was it only the flash of sunlight, with its shadow? No! the door was certainly ajar. It was a thrilling moment. Marjorie clutched Dick's arm, her little frame quivering with excitement. Dick's mind had far outstripped hers, and was already full of a thousand conjectures as to what might be on the other side of the door, or what might be suddenly shown them. All at once, Marjorie's grasp of her brother's arm tightened; her face was full of resolution, her eyes fairly dancing with exultation.

"Dick," she said, "the door is open at last; let us go in."

Dick drew back in horror at the suggestion.

"We might find something wonderful

there," said Marjorie; "perhaps money, and oh! think how badly we need it."

"People don't find money and things near home like that," objected Dick; "they always have to go far away to look for it."

"But this place is different from other places," said Marjorie.

"The door wouldn't have been left open if there was anything inside," persisted Dick.

"It might have been forgotten just for once," said Marjorie; "but anyway, Dick, whether you come or not, I am going to see what is inside that door."

She threw back her head, with a light in her brown eyes, which Dick seeing, knew that it was hopeless to turn his sister from her purpose.

"What will mamma say?" he cried, desperately.

"Think how splendid for her, if we should find money or treasure in there," replied Marjorie. "Poor mamma has no money to pay the rent with, and the doctor's bill came yesterday, and she can't get any coal for the winter. Oh, Dick, we must go! If you don't, I'll go alone."

"You can't do that," said the boy, firmly.

He could be brave enough once he had made up his mind, and he could not let his sister face unknown dangers without him. To him it seemed that there might be perils instead of treasures on the other side of that door, and even death instead of gold.

"If you go I will go, too," he cried, resolutely following Marjorie up the steps, his near-sighted eyes strained to catch the secrets which might be revealed by the opening of the door. Marjorie, gathering courage, gave the door a push. But instead of opening farther, it swung upon its hinges with a slight jarring sound. To Marjorie it seemed like a human voice murmuring:

"Too late!"

And having swung so for a moment or two, it closed gently, but firmly, by some impulse from within. There was a look of blank disappointment upon Marjorie's face as she walked down the steps slowly. This presently changed to an expression of determination not often seen upon a child's face. Dick for his part gave a sigh of relief.

As the children turned and stood facing the inhospitable door, to Marjorie it seemed that every leaf and tendril of the vine which

had grown down from one of the big houses till it rested on the wall above the door, seemed to whisper:

"Too late!"

But the bird piping above had a joyous note of encouragement in his voice, urging Marjorie to persevere; the spider, solemnly weaving a great web on the door, gave a lesson in his own way:

"Do as I do! Never be overcome by obstacles!"

Marjorie, raising her head as if in defiance, cried out:

"I will come here every day until that door opens the least little bit, and then I will go in."

Dick said nothing. He was glad in his heart that the fatal door had closed upon them, and he ran and leaped at his sister's side, in a manner quite unusual to him, all along the homeward way. Marjorie sighed and reflected in her old-fashioned way:

"Dick will never succeed in the world. He is always so glad when obstacles are taken out of his way."

She was annoyed, too, that he seemed to rejoice when she was so disappointed. So

she said not a word of her plans, nor of the mysterious doorway, though it haunted her more than ever. She had a burning impatience to know what lay upon the other side of it, and she was resolved that sooner or later she would go in.

CHAPTER II.

THE CHILDREN AT HOME.

MARJORIE and Dick lived in a very shabby house on a side street, where all the houses were small and many of them were rather tumble-down. But the children's mother always declared that she did not mind that at all; that she was thankful to be away from the tenement houses, with their overflowing population.

On the doorstep of this shabby house, that same afternoon, stood a careworn-looking woman, shading her eyes with her hand and watching for their approach. Dick was so like her that any one might have known him for her son. There was no trace of the mother in Marjorie's strong, almost rugged features.

Her face cleared as she caught sight of the children coming up the street side by side. The afternoon light fell through the

branches of an elm-tree upon them, and they seemed, as it were, bathed in light, as sometimes people are seen in a dream.

"I was afraid something had happened to you, when you were so long in coming," said the mother, as the little ones came within speaking distance of her.

"Something might have happened," began Dick, but Marjorie squeezed his hand to be silent. If she heard the story, their mother might forbid them to cross the mysterious threshold; and even strong-willed Marjorie would never think of disobeying her mother. Instinctively she felt, though she was too loyal to put the thought in words, that her mother, like Dick, would never surmount any obstacles nor brave any dangers that could be avoided.

So Dick was silent and he and Marjorie followed their mother into the kitchen, where a bright fire was burning and the tea-kettle was steaming merrily away. Dick rubbed his hands with delight, and even Marjorie relaxed in the genial atmosphere.

"I was just waiting till you'd come home to make the pancakes," said the mother. "So, Marjorie, run up and take off your

things, and you'll be just in time to carry the first panful in to the table."

Marjorie did as she was bidden, reappearing from above in time to bring in a smoking pile of the hot cakes. They were delicious, brown and crisp, as only their mother could make them. The mother stayed without to bring in a second plateful.

Marjorie and Dick seated themselves at the neatly set table as directed, and began to demolish the pancakes.

"If we get through the door," whispered Marjorie, "perhaps we shall have grand things for supper."

"I like pancakes," said the unambitious Dick. He was always easily satisfied about his food, and he was not nearly so sanguine as Marjorie about the advantages to be gained by passing through the doorway. To Marjorie the land beyond was one of delight, to Dick one of terror.

"So do I like pancakes!" said Marjorie; for it was a point of honor with the children to like whatever their mother made for them; "but we might have a servant to cook them and let mamma rest, and we might have stewed plums or peaches and cream besides."

This sounded tempting, but Dick said nothing. He thought it better to be safe, than go through that terrible door and perhaps see something awful on the other side of it. When the tea dishes were washed and put away, the mother sat down to read some stories to the children by the light of the sitting-room lamp. These stories she often supplemented by reflections of her own, or by others she remembered, and these the children much preferred. They sat at her feet on a brightly colored rug, making an unconsciously pretty picture in the firelight which stole in from the kitchen, with a warmer glow than usual, Dick thought. For it was a contrast to that black picture he had drawn of the door opening softly in the starshine to let out a crowd of shadows. Dick and Marjorie often interrupted the reading to ask questions, and their mother always gave them the required explanation. She had been well educated in her youth, and had preserved the imaginative quality which Dick had inherited from her, through all the years of toil and loss and privation.

Marjorie was more absent-minded than usual. Ordinarily, she threw her whole soul

into the reading, and delighted her mother by the vivid interest she took in her story and the quaint comments she made upon the various characters in the tale. But on this night she was wondering, wondering, wondering what she would have seen if only the door had not closed at just that moment. She was reproaching herself, too, that she had not rushed forward and gone in the moment the door had been opened.

Once her mother asked her:

"What ails you to-night, Marjorie?"

Marjorie reddened and said nothing.

"You don't appear to have been listening to what I read," the mother added more severely.

"Oh, yes, I was listening," said Marjorie.

But she knew very well that it was with a divided attention. It was rather a relief to her when the book was closed, and her mother, restoring it to its place on the shelf, went to look after some household details. When they went upstairs at bed-time Marjorie mechanically lit two tiny tapers before the statue of the Blessed Virgin, and arranged the flowers in the vases, preparatory to the night prayer. This was one of her

duties, and she had performed it faithfully ever since she was seven years old. But to-night she bungled her simple work. One of the tapers fell out of her hand, lighted, and put an ugly grease-spot on the floor.

"Fie, Marjorie," said her mother, "a great girl of twelve to do such a thing!"

Marjorie hung her head, but said nothing, and presently her mother's calm, weary voice began to recite the night prayers and the Rosary.

A sudden thought struck Marjorie. She would put in a petition of her own:

"Please, God, let me get through the doorway to find some money for mamma. Holy Mary, pray that the door may be open, and that nothing can close it until I get in."

The mother was quite unconscious of this strange prayer, but Marjorie managed to signal Dick:

"I am praying about the door. You pray, too!"

But Dick scarcely felt equal to praying for something that he did not want, and replied by a shake of the head, which Marjorie, in turn, answered by a frown. This attracted the mother's attention:

"Marjorie," she said, severely, "I can't go on with the prayers if you don't stop. What on earth has got into you to-night? This is the third time I have had to speak to you!"

Marjorie did not offend again, and strove to keep her mind fixed altogether upon the prayers. But when she got to bed she began to wonder again about the mystery she had so nearly solved. She fell asleep, only to be wakened by a thunder storm. This started a fresh conjecture in the little girl's mind. Was it storming on the other side of the doorway, or was it all calm and serene there! She buried her face in the pillow not to see the lightning, and presently forgot everything in a sound, dreamless sleep.

Dick, on the other hand, remained awake far into the night. When he did sleep he was aroused by the banging of imaginary doors and the whisper of many voices, all seeming to come out of that doorway between the white-faced brick houses.

"I wish Marjorie would stay away from that door," he said to himself over and over again, feverishly. He repeated the words even in his sleep, so that his mother heard the muttering and bent over him anxious-

ly. But she could make nothing of his disconnected words, and having felt his head and hands, went back to bed again, with a sigh of relief.

CHAPTER III.

MARJORIE'S VENTURE.

NEXT morning Marjorie woke early, her mind full of a settled purpose. She would steal away without Dick, and if the door should be open, she would see what was inside. Then, if things were as wonderful and beautiful in there as she expected, she would come back and bring Dick thither. But if it were, as Dick fancied, terrible or even disappointing, it would be best that only one should make the experiment.

During breakfast Marjorie was unusually silent and found it hard to finish her plate of porridge, because of a strange lump in her throat, which seemed to prevent her from eating. She drank her mug of milk with avidity, however, and felt quite strong for her great venture. As she helped her mother to wash the dishes and put them in their places she kept repeating to herself:

"If that door will only be open!"

The mother, meantime, began to talk after a fashion in which Marjorie had rarely heard her indulge. She spoke of the past, when she had had plenty of servants to work for her and lived in a fine house, and how as a little girl, she had had a maid to take her to school.

"Perhaps you will be able to have servants again, poor mother," thought Marjorie, "if only I can get through that door, and if—"

She paused. She had not Dick's imagination, and could not fill in details as he would have done. Dick was busy bringing up wood and coal from the cellar and clearing out the stove, to be ready for making a new fire. So he did not hear very much of what was being said.

After the morning's work was done the children's mother bade them go out and play for a while. Marjorie hung about her mother in a way not quite usual to her, and after she had gone out on the sidewalk she gave Dick a trinket which he had long coveted. This was a tiny basket cut from a nut shell.

"You can wear it on your chain, Dick," she said. But she watched him rather wistfully as

he eagerly hung it on the chain, accompanying a watch, which had been his father's. Marjorie, indeed, felt a pang of regret at parting with this little object, which she had so long worn, and she had so few personal possessions. Still, she felt that she would like to make that sacrifice for Dick, in case, in case—here the lump in the throat grew larger and she could not finish the sentence, even in her own mind. Dick was surprised that his sister did not refer to the doorway. It was unlike Marjorie to give up an idea so quickly. He was too much relieved, however, to say anything about it himself. He had made up his mind, indeed, to avoid the neighborhood of that doorway, if Marjorie would let him. Marjorie's face gave him no clue to her thoughts. She played marbles with him, as usual, having first carefully turned up her clean brown gingham frock, lest it should get soiled.

She knew a good many boyish games, as her brother had no other playmate. She could spin a top or throw a ball better than Dick could, while she was an expert at marbles. She, on the other hand, had to play at odd times, with her only doll, alone. Dick

never took the smallest interest in it, though he submissively drank tea, which Marjorie prepared and served in tiny teapot and cups.

Marjorie did not win at marbles that morning, and sometimes when an alley was taken by Dick she would give a queer little exclamation and the thought would flash into her mind:

"Oh, suppose something should take me!"

It was curious to watch her, kneeling on the pavement. Her brown straw hat had been thrown back upon her neck in the ardor of the combat, so that her tangle of dark hair fell almost over her face, as she stooped to shoot her marbles with steady aim.

"I think I'm the only girl that plays marbles," she said once, suddenly sitting back to reflect.

"No, lots of them do," said Dick. "I often see them buying marbles at the five cent shop."

"Perhaps they play in the house," said Marjorie. "I don't think they get down on the sidewalk to play. But it doesn't matter."

And she leaned over for a shot, vigorous and true as ever. She was beginning to wonder how she should ever get away from Dick,

when all at once their mother appeared at the door.

"One of you will have to go to the grocery," she said. "I need some eggs."

Both children volunteered, but Dick was finally sent, his mother giving him some other commissions to do at the same time.

"Do you want me for anything?" asked Marjorie.

"No," said her mother, "you can stay out until nearly dinner-time. I'll call you when I want you."

"But I won't be here," thought Marjorie, with a sinking heart, "unless that door should be open and I could just take a peep and run back again."

She gathered up the marbles and carried them into the house, putting them into a bag in the hall cupboard, while Dick went whistling down the street.

Marjorie watched him with a strange feeling. Everything seemed strange that morning, and everything so dear and precious that she dreaded the thought of parting with them. Her mother, Dick, the house, the sidewalk, her few toys, each had a new interest, in the light of possible change and possible parting.

She tried to cheer herself with the thought that she would be gone only a little time, and that she might come back rich, with the power to help her mother and Dick. But it was, after all, with a sinking heart that, having watched Dick out of sight, she turned the corner, walking towards the captivating doorway with a slow step, very different from her ordinary brisk pace. If only Dick were going with her! But she felt that it was best for Dick to remain at home.

It seemed to her that all the people she met knew of her purpose and condemned it. One man, who looked at her closely, seemed to say:

"How can you make up your mind to do such a thing, without your mother's knowledge?"

It was really conscience which spoke within her, but she fancied the man had spoken, and she answered the voice:

"It is for my mother's sake, mostly, I am going. And if anything should happen to me, I have left her Dick. Because if Dick is there, she won't miss me so much. Mothers always like boys best."

The man, who was leaning against the iron

railing of the house, regarded the little girl with a half-amused, half-reflective look on his face. But Marjorie felt the twinkle in his eye to be a reproach to her, and hurried on to escape him.

But other men that she met, as well as women and children, seemed to join in an accusing concert. A great tabby, too, who lay drowsily in the sun, looked at her with so knowing an air that Marjorie almost thought she must be a fairy, while a big dog, who gazed up into her face, wagging his tail, seemed to be giving her a friendly warning. Still she trudged on. How far it seemed, though Dick and she used to say it was only a step to the doorway!

At last, the two brick houses came in sight. Marjorie's heart began to beat fast when she saw the familiar white facings. She stood still a moment, irresolute. Perhaps, after all, it was better to go home and be safe and comfortable with her mother and Dick than run into danger and trouble for the sake of gain. Perhaps her mother would rather they should all stay poor than have her try such an experiment.

But something in her character, strong,

resolute, and habitually fearless, urged her on. She had often blamed Dick for wanting to avoid obstacles. She was not going to turn back before any had even offered. It must be owned that while a desire to benefit her mother was the strongest motive which had led her on, Marjorie had a burning curiosity to see what lay on the other side of the door, especially since it had so mysteriously opened and no less mysteriously closed. Some one must have done that. It could not have been the wind, because none was blowing at the time.

This circumstance, which had so terrified Dick and made him resolve to keep away from the place, had only inspired Marjorie with fresh resolve. It had convinced her that this doorway was no ordinary one, as she had sometimes feared, but that it led to some place and concealed something definite.

Her courage and energy returned all at once. She thought of her mother, worn out with work and weighed down with care. She would make the effort, and she began to run in order to reach her destination the sooner. She was out of breath and panting when

she stopped again. Her cheeks were glowing red and her eyes shining with excitement. There was the doorway, with the vine still drooping over it, waving to and fro very softly in the light breeze. There was the bird, hopping busily about on his own concerns, and only stopping now and again to chirp out a few notes. There was the spider, with a magnificent web extending over one whole corner of the door and full of flies. He had succeeded. All this Marjorie saw; and then, with a quick bound of the heart, she saw something more.

CHAPTER IV.

MARJORIE INSIDE THE DOOR.

THAT which had set Marjorie's heart beating so violently and sent the blood tingling through her body was the very simple circumstance that the door was open—just a little, so little that at first Marjorie had not discovered it.

"Now," she thought, "I shall *know*, and can go home in a few minutes either to bring Dick, or—"

She did not want to dwell on that other possibility. She gathered up all her strength and, setting her brown hat firmly on her head, she mounted the steps and pushed the door. It yielded to her touch. No hand came to close it. There was a breathless hush.

Marjorie could hear the beating of her own heart. She was conscious of nothing

more. She had a sensation of falling, a vision of something green, and a half consciousness that the door had closed behind her, so that she could not go back for Dick, nor yet run away.

She woke at last and found herself on a smooth patch of green grass, cool and soft to the touch. She lay motionless in the pleasant stillness, trying to remember where she was. The voice of her friend, the bird, gave her this information. It came to her through the door, as he chirped about his work. She sprang to her feet, feeling a little stiff and sore, and found that she had fallen some distance down. The door was in the wall, indeed; the same to which the treacherous steps outside had led hospitably, but there were no corresponding steps on the inner side. Had she fallen upon stone instead of upon the grass she might never have awakened from that long, dreamless sleep. Her first thought was of the door, but she remembered the sharp click with which it had closed after her. She realized with a sinking heart that she was alone and helpless. She could never climb up to that door, nor get it open. She stood star-

ing at it with dilated eyes, with the one thought uppermost in her mind that, even if it should open again, she could not reach it. She would never get out. She would have to stay in this spot, perhaps, till she was old, with white hair and wrinkled face.

This thought was followed by another. She would not even live to be old. She would soon die from want of food. A sound aroused her and set her trembling violently. But it was only a toad hopping about in the soft grass at her feet and seeming to eye her inquisitively with its beady brown eyes. She fancied the creature had a malicious look about it, as though it rejoiced at her misfortune. At another time she would have enjoyed playing with it and making it hop by poking it with a stick, but now she turned away, almost in fear. It was part of the mystery of the place, and was associated in her mind with that door which she felt was a trap to catch children. She stood facing it and dared not turn around. Her curiosity had all gone for the moment. She saw only the patch of green grass at her feet, the closed door, with the cruel wall leading up to it, and the toad. It is true the sky was over-

head, and for a time Marjorie took comfort from that.

But gradually the light began to fade. It seemed to the little girl that it must be years since the sun had shone upon the pavement where Dick and she played marbles. The darkness crept on surely, though slowly, and as it grew and grew, closing in like some fearful shape about the little girl, the tears rolled down Marjorie's cheeks, wetting her gingham dress. Her plan of making money to help every one faded pitifully away, and only the thought remained that she was punished for having left home without her mother's knowledge, and that probably she would be left to die there alone. Her home came before her very vividly as she had seen it the night before, the kitchen fire with the kettle steaming merrily upon it, and the table set out in the lamp-light, with pancakes heaped in the dish before her. She crept very close to the door, and dried the tears from her eyes with the back of her hand. Even the bird had ceased his labors and his song, and she vaguely wondered if the spider were out there still, gathering in flies to his web with deadly certainty. It seemed to her

that the insect was a bad, malignant fairy guarding the door, through which she, like the flies, had walked. Dick had been right. They should have gone away and never come back to that horrible spot. It frightened her, too, to think of the brick houses on either side, silent and gloomy, one of them, at least, empty, their white marble facings seeming to her excited fancy like faces staring out into the night.

She began to say her prayers, the same night prayers that she had said every night at home without thinking so very much of their meaning. But now, every word came from her heart, and she felt wonderfully cheered and comforted when she had finished. Even if she had done wrong, God would take care of her, she felt sure, and the Blessed Virgin. She liked to remember that her good angel was near, with his great wings shutting out the darkness. She repeated over and over the little prayer to her angel that she had learned so long ago, and she told that heavenly guide in all simplicity that she had hoped to help her mother by coming through the door, and that she had given up having Dick with her for her mother's sake. How

glad she would have been to have had him with her, and he would have been so much afraid and would have despaired at once of ever getting away!

As the stillness deepened Marjorie thought she heard many noises—voices whispering overhead and in the grass at her feet, walls creaking and steps approaching. The night, with all its terrors, wore itself away at last and the white light of dawn began to streak the sky and make objects visible. Marjorie felt so great a relief that it was almost like joy. She sank down on the grass in very weariness and fell asleep, while the morning broke over the quiet city and the bustle began to come into the streets, the sound of milk-carts rumbling by and the steps of early workers going to their toil. Life in fact began, heedless of the little girl lying asleep after her night of terror inside that door, which had closed her, as it were, into a prison. The bird resumed his toil like the rest; the spider wove, and the leaves and tendrils of the vines were touched by the morning sunlight with dewy freshness, as new hope touches the weary hearts of men and women with the coming of a new day.

Marjorie slept on and on, her brown hat pushed back from her head, her face stained with tears and her hair falling in a tangled mass. She started every once in a while, as if, poor little sleeper! she was conscious of her trouble. Sometimes she spoke, saying audibly, *"Dick,"* or *"Mother."* The sound of her voice caused the toad to hop away to a distance.

It was as well she did not know that a human face bent over her, and human eyes looked down at her intently.

The dawn had given place to the brightness of day, when she started up, dazed and bewildered, and still more stiff and sore than the first time she had risen. It all flashed upon her in the twinkling of an eye, the full terror and helplessness of her situation.

But with the morning her courage had returned and the determination to see what was to be seen, and if possible to find her way. There might be a door at the other end; she thought she would try, and so thinking, she turned to take a look at her surroundings.

CHAPTER V.

DICK AND HIS MOTHER GO IN SEARCH OF MARJORIE.

When Dick had fulfilled all his commissions and come home, his first thought was to find Marjorie. She was not on the sidewalk nor round the corner. He went out to the yard; he thought Marjorie might have gone out there to dig up her little flower bed, which lay side by side with his, or to water the flowers. There lay the spade and hoe she had been using that morning, and the watering-pot stood near. But there was no Marjorie.

His mother was very busy cooking the dinner, so Dick did not like to disturb her. He took a look into the kitchen, to be sure that Marjorie was not there, and peeped into the tiny sitting-room, which served for their dining-room as well; then he went upstairs

and searched through all the rooms. He felt disappointed at having found no trace of his sister, but he said nothing to his mother; only went downstairs again and sat on the front steps, whistling and feeling lost without Marjorie. He wondered where she had gone. It wasn't like her to go off on any expedition without him, and he felt aggrieved that she had done it now. She had no playmates nor acquaintances with whom she could have gone.

When dinner was ready his mother came to the door and said:

"Where's Marjorie? I called her several times to peel the potatoes and help with the dinner, but she didn't answer."

"She isn't here," said Dick. "I don't know where she can have gone."

His mother took the alarm instantly. "Why, what can have happened?" she said. Marjorie would never have stayed away so long without telling her. She could not eat any dinner, she was so worried. There were so few places Marjorie could go, and Dick had no suggestions to offer. At last, with a quick relief, Marjorie's mother said:

"I do believe she has gone across town to

Cousin Lucy's. She was talking about it the other day."

"I don't think she'd have gone without telling me," said Dick; "and she would have told you, mother, too."

"Perhaps she didn't expect to be gone long," said the mother, "and as you weren't here, she might have thought she would just run over. And, of course, Lucy kept her."

This idea comforted the mother, but was highly displeasing to Dick. He very much resented Marjorie's stealing away without him to visit Cousin Lucy, for such visits were not very frequent, and were looked upon as a great treat by the children.

"And she knows I can't go for another three months," he said to himself. "It's just as mean as can be, and it isn't one bit like Marjorie."

He was too loyal to find fault with his sister to his mother. He never liked getting Marjorie into trouble. Dick spent the afternoon alone. It dragged wearily without Marjorie. He tried to play, but most games they played in common. He took a book, but found that he couldn't finish a page. His resentment against his sister grew every moment. When

it began to be dark he did, indeed, feel somewhat uneasy, especially when he saw his mother's pale face and anxious eyes. Supper was eaten in silence. Then the mother, without waiting to wash dishes or put things in order, went upstairs and put on her street costume and her bonnet.

"Get your hat and come with me," she said to Dick. "I'm going to Cousin Lucy's."

She put a light in the window and left the key in a place which Marjorie knew, under the door-mat, in case the little girl should come home while they were gone. Then, taking Dick by the hand, she got into a cable car, and sat quite silent until they had to alight and begin the walk across town. Dick was still angry at his sister, but it consoled him very much that he was going to Cousin Lucy's house, where they would probably have a pleasant evening. He felt certain that Marjorie must be there. But the mother was far from being so sanguine. Marjorie had never done such a thing before, had never, in fact, gone anywhere without her mother's permission, and it was not at all likely she would do so now. So there was an ag-

onizing fear at the mother's heart which gave her no rest, and she counted the blocks with feverish eagerness, annoyed whenever the car stopped to take on or let out passengers. It seemed to her as if they would never reach Cousin Lucy's. All the time Marjorie's little figure was before her, in the brown dress and broad hat as she had seen her that morning, and she imagined that same little figure wandering through crowded streets, or lost in the maze of people and vehicles, getting ever farther and farther away from home.

Dick rather enjoyed the drive in the cars through the brilliantly lighted streets, and his near-sighted eyes peered out, striving to take in as many of the unusual sights as possible. The children or their mother rarely got into the cars at all, car fare being an object to them, so that the boy was in good spirits and almost forgave Marjorie the trick she had played upon him, because of this treat which it had procured for him.

At last they reached the street where Cousin Lucy lived. Dick's hand was grasped by his mother, as she sped along at a pace quite unusual to her. For she was ordinarily

quiet in all her ways, and somewhat languid in her movements.

When they arrived at the house everything was dark and silent. There was no movement anywhere, no light in any of the windows, not a sign of life.

"Cousin Lucy may have started to bring Marjorie home," the mother said in a trembling voice, with an appealing look at Dick to see what he thought. But Dick did not like the suggestion at all. It would be a distinct disappointment to him.

"It was mean of Marjorie to come without me!" he broke out.

"Oh, Dick, *did* she come?" cried the mother, with a very pale face and a hand pressed to her heart. Then, for the first time, did anything like real fear enter Dick's soul, and he felt something of what his mother had been feeling ever since it grew dark. Mother and son together climbed the steps. The bell was pulled violently in their excitement, and resounded through the quiet house in a manner to startle the hearers. For some time there was no answer, then a deliberate foot on the stairs, and presently ap-

peared Cousin Lucy's factotum, an old servant, who had been long in her employ.

"Oh, it's you, ma'am," said the servant, with a look of surprise; "and Master Dick, too. I'm sorry, ma'am, but Miss Lucy's just gone out."

"Out?" echoed the poor mother, faintly; "and is—is Marjorie with her?"

"Bless you, no, ma'am. Miss Marjorie hasn't been here these two months."

The mother turned to Dick, with a look of such blank dismay and distress upon her face that the old servant was moved to ask:

"Won't you step in, ma'am, and have a glass of wine or a cup of tea? You look ready to drop."

"Oh, Bridget," cried the mother, despairingly, "Marjorie hasn't been home since this morning, and we don't know what has happened to her!"

Bridget, horrified at the news, tried to think of something comforting to say, but the mother, taking Dick's hand, hurried off, saying: "We must go back, Bridget. She may have come home, you know."

"That's so, ma'am. I pray God she has."

So they turned away, the mother feeling

the need of Marjorie's robust nature, which had often helped her in other emergencies. As for Dick, he felt as though he were turned to stone, for he suddenly remembered the mysterious doorway.

CHAPTER VI.

MARJORIE'S MOTHER GETS A LETTER.

It gave Dick so great a shock to remember that terrible doorway, which had already made so unpleasant an impression upon his mind, that he began to tremble violently. He felt certain that Marjorie had gone through that door, and that she would never come back to them. No one could tell what might have befallen her there. His mother was too absorbed to notice the boy's agitation, and he, with his customary indecision, began to wonder whether or no he should say anything to his mother about the door, or wait till the morning. In the first place, he had so great a horror of the spot that he hated to think of going there in the dark. In the second, it seemed to him that nothing could be done until the morning in any case. If the door were open, Marjorie would come out; if it were closed, what could he and his mother do?

So he decided to wait till the morning. But he was haunted all night by the vision of that door opening and shutting, letting out fearful shapes and closing in others. Sometimes he dreamed that he was beating at the door with both hands and calling Marjorie, but that no voice answered. The terror of it all so worked upon the sensitive boy, with grief for Marjorie's disappearance, that by morning he was in a high fever and quite delirious.

The mother had now the double anxiety of her boy's illness and Marjorie's continued absence. The strain upon her would have been too great for endurance had not Cousin Lucy arrived early next morning, and announced her intention of staying as long as possible. Her advice was to put Marjorie's case into the hands of the police, and with characteristic promptitude she went herself to police headquarters and caused all the stations to be notified of the child's disappearance. Then she returned to cheer the broken-hearted mother. The latter, being more of Dick's disposition than of Marjorie's, sat with clasped hands and a weary, hopeless face beside the bed where Dick lay. The boy

raved and raved, often mentioning a doorway, and sitting upright with dilated eyes as he talked of it. But no heed was paid to his mutterings, which would have furnished a clue to the police, and have put Cousin Lucy's vigorous mind upon the track. So the two women sat near the bed and heard without understanding those vague words and disjointed sentences:

"White marble and red brick. Two houses. The door! the door! Marjorie, it's open!"

On one of these occasions when the boy had sat bolt upright, gazing before him with frightened eyes, the mother got up quietly and closed the door, thinking that it disturbed him to see it open. As Dick sank back wearily and ceased his muttering, the mother concluded that her surmise had been correct.

Once Cousin Lucy said:

"My dear, he seems to talk very much about some door. What door can it be?"

"I suppose it is in his mind that Marjorie will come to the door," said the mother, her tears falling fast, as they always did when she spoke of the little girl.

Miss Lucy, who had brought some necessary articles of clothing and meant, as has been said, to stay with her cousin, left the darkened atmosphere of the sick-room once a day, at least, to ask for news at the police station. But she returned from each of these visits less hopeful. Strong and sanguine as she naturally was, she began at last to despair.

Marjorie, it appeared, had been swallowed up in the great vortex of the city; how, when, where, were mysteries which would never, perhaps, be solved. Perhaps the child was dead, had been thrown into the water, run over by the cars. Possibly she had been kidnapped. The latter alternative appeared to Miss Lucy the most probable, for if any accident had happened to the child it must necessarily have become known to the police, especially as they were naturally eager to secure the large reward offered out of her abundance by Miss Lucy.

So darkness settled upon the little house, where peace and contentment had reigned in spite of care and poverty. Marjorie's mother grew daily more despondent and broken-down, and as Dick began to mend, it be-

came clear to Miss Lucy that her cousin must break down unless some relief be afforded.

Then she began to talk of change, and of taking Dick and his mother away to some quiet country place near the city. But the mother almost angrily rejected the proposal.

"Do you think I would leave here?" she cried. "No! not even for one day or night, lest Marjorie should come and find the house closed."

Cousin Lucy saw that farther discussion was useless. But she noted with concern the growing weakness and pallor of her cousin, who had never been of a robust constitution. Her only pleasure seemed to be to haunt Marjorie's little room, which was scarcely more than a cupboard, adjoining her mother's, but in which the child had taken a singular pride. The mother now walked about it, taking down the little dresses from the hooks and hanging them up again. They were few in number and mostly shabby, except one in which Marjorie had delighted, and which was covered where it hung with a sheet. It was a blue and white check of cheap material, with a small bow of ribbon at the neck. Once Lucy entered just as the

mother had spread it out upon the bed and was regarding it with sorrowful intentness.

"Poor Marjorie's best dress!" said the mother, with a wan smile. "She was so proud of it. I made it for her just a month before she went away."

Lucy went out with a great sob rising in her throat, and the mother quietly replaced the little garment, covering it again with the sheet. Another day she showed Lucy two or three small ornaments which Marjorie had got for her bureau. The bureau itself was a small and shabby chest of drawers, from which the paint was almost entirely worn. It had been purchased at a second-hand shop and was much the worse for wear. One of the ornaments had been a birthday gift to Marjorie from her mother, the second Dick had purchased for her by his savings, and the third the child had herself bought with money from her savings bank. None of them had cost more than a few cents, and to Miss Lucy it was pathetic to think how precious they had been to their little owner. But she was constantly feeling the pathos of that humble household. Lucy was daily growing more anxious about her cousin and

more hopeless about Marjorie, when at last something happened to break in upon the monotony. One afternoon Miss Lucy returned from one of her visits to the police station, which had become merely formal. That day the police captain had volunteered a piece of information in addition to the usual curt: "No news whatever has been received at this office." This was to the effect that he believed the child was dead, as no trace whatever of her could be discovered. When Lucy reached the house she saw Marjorie's mother pacing up and down the kitchen floor, a bright red spot in either pale cheek, her hands clasped, her eyes dark with excitement.

"What is it?" cried Lucy, springing forward, fear and hope curiously blended in her voice and manner.

"Lucy," said the mother in a tone which sounded shrill and unnatural, "oh, Lucy! I have got a letter."

Saying which she tottered and would have fallen had not her cousin's strong arms sustained her. Lucy carried her, indeed, to a sofa in the sitting-room, but her eyes remained closed and it was evident that she

had fainted. Lucy felt her pulse and heart, opened her clothing, and laid her head very low. She decided to send for the doctor, who was already in attendance upon Dick, if her cousin did not soon revive. But that proved unnecessary, as the mother presently opened her eyes and fixed them upon Lucy, making an effort at the same time to speak. Lucy bent near to catch what she said, but could only distinguish the words:

"I've got a letter!"

CHAPTER VII.

MARJORIE BEGINS TO EXPLORE.

WHEN Marjorie had resolved to seek a way out, she turned her back upon the door and looked about her. She was in a passage formed, as it seemed, by the brick houses, and upon which a window opened at either side. But the walls were concealed with vines growing thickly and covered with scarlet flowers, which gave to the passage the appearance of a bower. Save for the grassy plot upon which Marjorie had fallen, there was a smooth pavement at her feet formed of tesselated stones of marbles. The colors were so bright, indeed, that they almost dazzled her eyes. Bright purple, green, red, yellow, were blended in strange figures. It was like an Eastern pavilion. She walked gingerly over these colored stones, as if afraid of soiling or breaking them, and came to what seemed a thick and impassable screen at the

other end. Marjorie, parting the tendrils with her hands, found an aperture quite large enough to pass through. She stood still, holding the foliage apart in her astonishment. Was she still dreaming? Were fairies real, after all, and was this something which belonged to them? She remembered very well how she had gradually come to the conclusion that there were no fairies, and how her mother, in one of the firelight tales at home, had told her half-sadly that they were only creatures of the imagination; her mother had added: "It's rather a pity not to be able to believe in fairies. It seems to make the world the darker." But here was a castle with turrets and spires, the roofs shining as if they were of glass, the walls of as many colors almost as the pavement.

It stood in the centre of a beautiful lawn, with a high fence all around, covered with the same thick vines as in the passage. At first Marjorie thought she would never have courage to approach this wonderful abode, but when she had stood a while her resolution returned. Why, she had expected to find some marvels hidden behind the strange doorway! "Oh, if Dick were only here to

enjoy them!" She stepped through the leafy opening, which closed as a door after her, and her feet were immediately buried in the thick grass. It seemed as if no human feet had ever trodden upon it, and there seemed to be no path. She thought she would walk around the house first, and then, perhaps, the owner of it might come out and she might explain her presence there.

She did not feel afraid. Her terror of the night before had vanished and she had a buoyant, confident feeling that, after all, what she had hoped for had happened. She walked around and around, but she caught no glimpse whatever of any human being. The windows, some of them with small lozenge-shaped panes of glass of a thousand colors, glittered in the morning sunlight. Humming-birds darted in and out of the vines above the door, as if they had been caught and set at liberty again to beautify the spot. Other birds of variegated plumage flew about, and there were gold and silver fish in the fountain which played in the centre of the lawn.

Marjorie examined the high wall, too, but saw no trace whatever of any entrance by

which she might get out. One great gate there was in the wall, bolted, and barred with heavy iron bars. Just at the moment Marjorie was not particularly anxious to leave the place. She wanted to penetrate farther into this strange, fascinating mystery, to know who lived in this enchanted house, which seemed to have sprung up by magic in the heart of prosaic New York. If she waited, surely some one would come out, of whom she could discover all that she wished to know. She forgot her hunger and weariness. It seemed as if new life had come into her, and new strength had been given.

So she stood still just where she could be seen from all the windows, making a quaint picture in her gingham frock and broad hat. Once she thought she saw a face, but it was only the sun glinting from the shining roof. Again, she fancied some one stood at the door, but it was merely a shadow cast by the waving syringa near by.

Her ear growing accustomed to stillness broken only by the twittering of birds, she believed that a gentle voice called her. But no! it was the wind softly stirring in the leaves. She was almost certain that she

heard the tinkling of a tiny bell, but, after all, it was the plashing of the fountain in which the beautiful fish were at play. She spoke, herself, at last, but the sound of her voice sounded so loud and shrill in that solitude that it alarmed her. She could not tell exactly how long she had waited, but she knew that the morning hours must be slipping away, and that it was important for her to solve the mystery, if ever so little, and to get home before nightfall. She knew how alarmed and distressed her mother would be at her absence, and that Dick, too, would be terrified. So she felt that she must get home before another night should set in. She, therefore, took the daring resolve to cross the threshold of the house, as she had before come through the doorway. The idea took away her breath at first, and she advanced slowly, pausing doubtfully at every instant and listening. She stood at last almost close to the door, a low one, at one side of the house. She could hear the beating of her own heart, and thought it was some one coming along the hall. But no; silence reigned supreme in the house.

As she put out her hand to ring the bell

the door flew open without the slightest touch from Marjorie. She looked all around for the person who had opened it. No one was in sight. She even looked behind the door. Nothing was there. She had heard no footsteps crossing the hall. It was another mystery. Marjorie determined, however, that she would not be daunted, whatever the obstacles she might have to overcome or the dangers she might have to face. Anything would be better than keeping her mother in suspense for another night, and she herself spending that night in the darkness. She shuddered at the thought, and, like the adventurous little heroine she was, resolutely crossed the threshold and entered the hall. Immediately the door closed upon her in the same noiseless and mysterious manner that it had opened, and she was left to gaze around at a variety of objects, filled the while with growing wonder and admiration.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LETTER.

When Marjorie's mother had so completely recovered from her swoon as to be able to sit up, she put the letter which she had received into Cousin Lucy's hand.

It was written in a clear, somewhat bold hand on the finest of stationery. But there were neither initials on the paper, address at the top, nor signature at the bottom. It read: "The one you seek is safe and well, but will not be allowed to return to you at present. She is on probation. What will come of it time alone can tell. Be patient and without anxiety. Any attempt to penetrate the mystery will result in discomfiture to those who seek, and will spoil everything."

Lucy's first unguarded exclamation, "It's the letter of a lunatic!" sent the blood from the mother's face. But Lucy modified it. "He has method in his madness," she added;

"and, my dear, as we can do nothing, we shall be sure to take his advice and be patient."

"It is hard," said the mother.

"Harder still to avoid anxiety," said Miss Lucy. "But I must go over to my house this afternoon. I have various things to attend to there. While I am gone I shall think it all over carefully, and you can do the same. Meanwhile, not a word to Dick. It would only excite him."

Miss Lucy bustled upstairs to see the invalid for a few minutes before getting on her things. Dick, who looked thinner and paler now the fever had left him, was lying languid and silent upon his pillow. He seemed unable to collect his thoughts, and spoke just as little as was possible. Half a dozen words fatigued him so much that he was glad to lie still with closed eyes. Miss Lucy gave him some roses she had bought for him that morning. His pale face brightened into something like pleasure when he saw them.

"They're pretty," he said, smiling, and keeping his eyes fixed upon them.

Miss Lucy and his mother often wondered if he had forgotten all about Marjorie's dis-

appearance, for he had never once spoken of her.

It seemed as if the fever had swallowed up all memory of her, and, of course, they were only too careful to avoid agitating him by any reference to the subject. Now, however, he raised himself slightly, and, speaking by a great effort, said: "Give some to Marjorie —when she comes in."

He lay back upon his pillow with a contented expression, as if he were glad of having made the effort.

"He has forgotten, then;" said Miss Lucy to herself. "What a providential circumstance! He would never have got well with that upon his mind."

Having bathed his head and straightened the pillow, she left him, casting a last look back from the door at the quiet figure on the bed, just touched by the light stealing in through the shutters. Her eyes were moist as she went into the little room, which she had adopted as her own, and while she was putting on her things she reflected on the situation. It seemed to her pathetic that Dick should have forgotten Marjorie's disappearance, and yet that he should wish to

share his pleasures with her as he had always done.

"Poor little Marjorie," she said to herself. "God grant no evil may befall, or that she is not in the hands of villains."

When she went downstairs she found her cousin sitting, holding the letter in both hands, studying this one link between her and the lost one.

"I am going to ask you to give me that letter," said Miss Lucy.

The mother instinctively held it tighter.

"I want to read it carefully," Lucy continued, "and, perhaps, I shall put it into the hands of the police."

"Don't, Lucy! oh, I beg of you, don't do that!" cried the mother, in great agitation. "You see what is said in the letter. It might be of the greatest injury to Marjorie to set the police on the track."

"Well, we shall see," said Lucy "but, my dear, should I decide that such a course of action is for the best and most likely to result in Marjorie's quick return, will you not let me follow it?"

"I am afraid," the mother said. "I feel that it is better not."

"But just reflect," urged Lucy; "how can the mysterious hints thrown out in this letter prevent the police from working on the case? We have no Bastile here, and magic is a thing of the past."

The mother bowed her head, covering her face with her hands. She was, in reality, saying a short, but fervent, prayer.

"Do what you think best, Lucy," she said at last. "I rely upon your judgment, and I have only my instinct to urge against it."

So Miss Lucy took the letter, saying as she went out:

"It is a great thing to know that Marjorie is alive and well. Our efforts are no longer hopeless, for we must and will find her. So keep up your heart. I shall be back soon."

All the way home Miss Lucy was very much engrossed with the letter.

"Who can have written it?" she kept repeating to herself. "Where did it come from?" . . . . .

After she reached her own house Bridget could scarcely get a word out of her, so busy was she in poring over the document and noting every characteristic of the handwriting.

"But, ma'am, dear," said Bridget in despair, "there's a dozen things I want to ask you; and that man's been here about the roof three times already."

"He must come a fourth," said Lucy, who was on the third line of the letter.

"And there's a woman from the Home with a message. She wants an answer."

"She must come back," cried Lucy.

"Can't I get your orders for the week, Miss Lucy, ma'am?" asked poor Bridget.

"Never mind orders; do as you please," returned Lucy. "Only do leave me alone, there's a good soul."

Bridget went off in perplexity. Miss Lucy, who was so orderly, so business-like in everything, and who usually attended to the smallest details of her household herself, to throw it all aside this way was so amazing that she could scarcely believe it was true. She went down to the kitchen to ponder in turn over her mistress' strange behavior and to await her summons.

CHAPTER IX.

COUSIN LUCY GETS A CLUE.

Miss Lucy was, indeed, orderly, methodical and business-like, almost to a fault. Her house was managed to perfection. It was not a very large one, because she preferred a small one. But she might have had her choice of several, for she owned considerable property and superintended it, much as she attended to her domestic affairs. No agent was ever behind in his accounts, no tenant lagged with the rent. She was always kind, and even generous to a certain extent, towards her poor relatives. Marjorie's mother was her nearest of kin, and, in fact, almost the only relative that remained to her. She was the daughter of an aunt to whom Miss Lucy had been specially attached.

Still, it had required the great trouble which had befallen the little household, and her daily and hourly presence there, to give

her an insight into the wants, the privations, the daily needs, of her kins-people. It had been a revelation to Miss Lucy and had had a marked effect on her character. Hitherto it had sufficed for her to send presents at Christmas or on birthdays. The children paid her formal visits every two or three months. At first Lucy had regarded it as a somewhat unpleasant duty to invite them to spend a day, and she had even warned Bridget to put away everything breakable in the drawing-room, and to put a crash covering over the dining-room carpet.

But after a time she had discovered that neither little Marjorie nor her brother were likely to break ornaments; that they carefully wiped their shoes upon the mat before coming in, and that they did not spill anything at table. This discovery once made, she began to like the children, and even to look forward somewhat to their visits, provided they were not too often repeated. It was in quite a different tone that she said to Bridget the evening before one of these occasions:

"The children will be here to-morrow, so air your puddings and cakes."

Bridget, like her mistress, had grown

to hear the news without apprehension, and to take a certain pleasure in witnessing the children's enjoyment of her good things, in hearing their happy voices and merry laughter. Since the trouble which had brought her into close relation with her kinsfolk all the latent tenderness of Miss Lucy's character had been brought into play, and she resolved for the future to make things easier for mother and children. She knew now how many stitches the mother had to put in, often late at night, to give Marjorie a new frock, or to keep Dick in clothes. She had always seen the children looking nice, for they wore their best clothes when they came to her. Only now did she realize that they usually had to wear very shabby clothes, indeed. She discovered, too, how seldom they had anything more than the coarsest food; how butter was a luxury, and puddings had to be given up, and how, nevertheless, bills accumulated, despite all efforts. In fact, she saw that Marjorie's mother was being worn away in the struggle.

As for the children, it was plain that they never had any amusement save their own little plays and their brief visits to her. Miss

Lucy could see, too, how the ever-toiling mother missed Marjorie's capable little hands, which were always willing. So Miss Lucy was full of plans for the future. The keen regret which she had felt at the thought that she would never be able to make up to Marjorie for the past was lost now, since the coming of the letter, in the excitement of attempting to discover Marjorie's whereabouts.

Miss Lucy had been considered a beauty in her youth, and was still, at thirty-five years of age, well preserved and handsome. She had had a romance, people said, but she never talked about it. She was busy, contented, and prosperous.

After Bridget had left her Miss Lucy, in the solitude of her own room, pondered over the letter. As she sat, her feet upon a stool, her head resting against the back of a cushioned chair, one would have thought her almost youthful in appearance. The sunlight was streaming over her, but it showed no wrinkles on her smooth skin, nor no thread of gray in her dark hair. There was a quiet, bright, almost exultant look on her face, such as used to be there in her youth, and as

if she were looking out eagerly for something which she expected. The room was furnished with an almost austere simplicity, characteristic of the tenant. But it also had an air of elegance which showed that everything it contained was of the best—the plain linen shams, hemstitched; the daintily embroidered coverlet and toilet cover and mats, the neutral-tinted carpet, the spotless curtains.

"It puzzles me! it puzzles me!" cried Miss Lucy aloud to herself, as she held the paper to her nose and inhaled a peculiar perfume which lingered about it, as though it had been contained in some box of sandal-wood or other aromatic substance. This perfume had struck her at first when Marjorie's mother had handed her the letter. Her first feeling then had been that this slight, almost imperceptible scent, delicate yet subtly strong, had something to do with the East. And the idea had been vaguely alarming. But she had put it aside with the exclamation:

"What if it has an Oriental sort of smell, when half New York winters at Algiers, or penetrates the heart of India?"

Now, as she inhaled this perfume, it began all at once to grow familiar and to bring back

scenes and places and people from the past. But she shook off the dreaminess which came over her with those memories and set herself once more seriously to examine each particular syllable of that singular letter. There was one particular word which she examined for the hundredth time. When she had done so she cried out:

"I have a clue at last—the turn of that letter and the perfume."

But the exultation which she had felt suddenly deserted her. Her face grew very pale and she leaned back against the cushions, her lips moving in a strange, wordless way.

"Oh, that *that* should be the clue!" she murmured; "*that, that*!"

Bridget's knock at the door an hour later remaining unanswered, that worthy domestic turned the handle. The door was locked. Such a thing had never happened in her memory. Never had Miss Lucy locked her out. Night and day the room was free to her. She retired in some wrath to the kitchen, whence she did not emerge until her mistress' bell rang sharply. Then she found her sitting at table, with an absent, far-away look upon her face; such an expression, in-

deed, as Bridget had never seen there. And she spoke only these brief words:

"Bring me my tea at once. I must go back to my cousin's."

"I think the same cousins have bewitched her," thought Bridget to herself, as she went in quest of the tea. "She's a changed woman of late, but to-day beats all."

Meantime, Lucy awaited the tea, her head resting upon her hands and her thoughts centering about the clue, as Marjorie's had done about the doorway. Even when she got out on the street she walked away from the house almost mechanically, still thinking, thinking.

"She looks as if she had seen a ghost," said Bridget to herself, staring after her mistress, full of blended curiosity and concern. She had learned nothing from Miss Lucy that day upon any subject. Having inquired if there was any news of Marjorie, her mistress had replied:

"Yes, no; I don't know."

Miss Lucy had very early that afternoon made up her mind that, after all, she would withhold that letter from the police for a time, at least. If, after an interval, no fur-

ther tidings reached them of the child, it might, indeed, be necessary to make use of it. Since, however, she had discovered the clue, she became suddenly fearful that by some chance the police might hear of the letter. She was most anxious that they should interfere no farther in any way.

"We must wait," she said; "we must wait, and oh, God grant that this may not be a punishment."

CHAPTER X.

WHAT MARJORIE FOUND IN THE HOUSE.

MARJORIE having blessed herself, as was her wont in beginning any enterprise, passed into the circular hall in which she found herself as soon as the door closed upon her. Upon this hall several doors opened, and in the centre of it was a winding staircase which led upwards to a species of gallery, upon which many more rooms opened.

The floor of this hall was of tesselated marble, and, like the stones outside, of many colors blended together in a pattern which the little girl fancied contained some strange meaning. The light from the painted windows shone down upon her, too, in a variety of colors. These many-hued windows seemed to occupy this silent house, to glint in and out on the dark wainscoting with a peculiar, solemn beauty. The door of one room only stood open, and into that Marjorie walked.

It was apparently a dining-room, with a great glass-fronted cupboard, showing many varieties of china. There was a wide hearth with a pair of dogs upon it, in the form of dragons. The painted windows were faintly screened by hanging curtains of yellow silk. To Marjorie's surprise, the table was set as if for breakfast. She supposed it had either been left in that state since some one had breakfasted, or that that some one was still expected. As she drew near she perceived that the coffee-pot was hot and the beverage within it steaming. So were the rolls in the embroidered napkin. Under the massive silver cover, which Marjorie ventured to raise, she saw no fairy food at all, but only eggs and bacon. Oh, how hungry all this made poor Marjorie feel! It was many hours since she had tasted food, and here was everything so temptingly prepared.

Still, she felt a great delicacy in eating any of this breakfast, which was evidently awaiting some one, who might appear at any moment. She would go upstairs and look, and if she could not find any person, then certainly she must eat. She could not starve, and surely the owner of all these grand

things would not grudge a hungry little girl some breakfast.

She went towards the door, but as she did so it closed softly and noiselessly as the other door had done, and no effort of hers could open it. She was shut in with that appetizing breakfast. Despite the feeling almost of awe which came over her, she presently did what most hungry people would do; she sat down and ate heartily. Oh, how good everything tasted! And it certainly was not enchanted, but very real, food.

She had scarcely finished, when the door opened as softly as it had closed, and she was at liberty. This gave her a strange feeling, as though some invisible being were near and as if that being, whoever it might be, was providing for her comfort. She finally mustered up courage to go out into the hall and begin a search for that presiding genius. It could not be anything of evil, for it had so far done her only good. She would ask for some way by which to leave this enchanted abode, for the thought of her mother's alarm and distress was constantly in her mind. The tour of the house did not, however, proceed so quickly as she had expected.

She got as far as the next room and was gazing around in admiration, when the door again closed upon her and she was left to examine its beauties in detail. There was a profusion of books, delightful books, some of them with beautiful pictures, some without. Oh, if Dick, who was so fond of books, could only be here! There were boxes of quaintly carved figures representing people of all nations and of all conditions, soldiers, cavaliers, sailors, peasants, ladies, and shepherdesses. Marjorie amused herself for a considerable time in arranging them in groups.

There was a piano in the corner, but Marjorie could not make up her mind to touch it. There were a variety of games, some of which could be played alone. In fact, there was so much to amuse and interest a child that Marjorie almost forgot her desire to get home, and spent a very pleasant morning going from one delightful object to another. By the time she had almost exhausted the treasures of the room the door suddenly opened, and again she was free to wander into the hall.

When the forenoon had thus passed away

Marjorie heard the tinkle of a tiny bell. She followed the sound; surely, now she would find some one. But no; all the doors save the dining-room were shut, and as she went mechanically in she found that the breakfast had been cleared away and a luncheon set out, of the choicest viands. Evidently, she was not to die for want of food, and she saw now that these things were specially prepared for her.

After luncheon she found another door open, and, straying in, found herself in a great, stately drawing-room. She had never been in such a place in her life, and she felt almost afraid to stir there. Her feet sank in the carpet, as they had in the smooth grass without. She climbed into one of the great brocade-covered arm-chairs and stared about her.

Can any child imagine all that she saw? Rich and costly ornaments, curtains and draperies of Oriental richness, vases, screens, tables of rare woods, chairs of priceless carving, pictures and statues, which were worth more money than little Marjorie could count.

After a time she grew nervously afraid of the cavaliers and ladies in the painted win-

dows which occupied one side of the long room. They seemed to peep out from the draperies of silk which half obscured them, and to smile mockingly at the child, especially when the afternoon sun began to sink somewhat, till on a level with the windows it cast weird lights through them into the room. A crimson glow from one of them fell upon the tapestried wall of pink brocade opposite, precisely like a blood stain. An unaccountable terror seized upon Marjorie. Surely, that cavalier bowing with his plumed hat in hand was pointing to that, with a malicious smile at her. The company of painted people, indeed, from their station in the windows seemed to say to Marjorie with one voice:

"We were once living beings like you, and see what we have become. You will absorb so much of the light and beauty of this house that you will grow to be like us, a painted figure."

This was a queer fancy, but Marjorie was dozing asleep and dreaming, so that she thought she heard their voices very distinctly. She awoke with a start. The figures had disappeared in the darkness which had stolen

on while she slept. So figures familiar in the morning of life grow dim and vanish as the evening of age draws near.

Marjorie thought then that even those light, mocking faces would have been a relief in the terrible dimness and loneliness which enshrouded her. An agonizing feeling came over her that she was in prison and that she would be obliged to remain in this beautiful, fascinating place forever.

"It is a punishment," she said. "I did not mean to be wicked. But perhaps it was, to leave home without telling my mother."

The darkness weighed upon her, too, and terrified her. Her conscience smote her sorely. The thought of everything wrong she had ever done came into her mind vividly. Fortunately, her wrong-doing had been trifling. Ever since her First Communion two years before she had received the Blessed Sacrament frequently, and this thought gave her comfort now. She had lived as Catholic children mostly do, in the shadow of the faith, warmed, illumined, protected from evil. But such as her wrong-doing had been, she recalled it now, as people do, it is said, at the hour of death, and the tears began to

flow down her cheeks as she called aloud for her mother and Dick.

She put her hand to her neck to feel for her medals and scapulars, with the badge of the Sacred Heart that she always wore. Oh, if this darkness were to last forever; if, perhaps, she were closed into some great, gloomy place where she would have to remain. At that instant the light from a thousand jets flashed upon her. She rose hastily, in wonder at the brilliancy. It seemed to proceed from every part of the wall. It threw everything into bold relief, except the painted figures, which seemed to have retired farther and farther into the darkness. So it is with life. No later glory brings back the splendors of the morning.

By this new light Marjorie set herself, with reviving courage, to examine all the wonderful things which the room contained. To most of them Marjorie could have given no name. She had never seen anything like them. All at once a tiny clock near her chimed out the hour. It made her start, as if a human voice had spoken in the hall outside. It was the great clock which stood there tolling the hour with musical chimes.

And Marjorie was sure that she really did hear a voice. She went into the hall, but it was only a quaint figure of Time, which came out from the clock and counted the hour, crying: "Farewell, lost hour."

Marjorie watched this figure till it had disappeared; then she turned towards the door whence she had come. It was closed, and only the dining-room door stood open. She understood now that this opening and shutting of doors was a way of directing her movements. But how was it done, and who did it? Had ever a child been met with a puzzle like this before? She went, however, into the dining-room. There was another of those delicious meals set out upon the table. Many things were there which Marjorie had never tasted before, but she enjoyed everything with the appetite of a healthy child. Oh, if her mother and Dick could have been there, too!

When this evening meal was over Marjorie felt more solitary than ever. Here was another night, and she was no nearer solving the mystery nor getting home. She went out into the hall again, and finding every door closed, she sat down upon the spiral stairs;

and after a time it occurred to her that she would go up. This seemed rather a venturesome thing to do, but she must go in somewhere and she might find out something up there. She began to feel very drowsy, too, as she usually went to bed early, and she thought that after she had been upstairs she would throw herself down upon one of these heavy rugs and go to sleep.

But when she reached the top of the stairs there was a single door open, from which a light was shining. Marjorie crossed the threshold; she found herself in a dainty little bedroom. The bed, prettily canopied with blue silk, had been freshly made up with snow-white linen. Everything showed preparation as for a guest. Even a ruffled gown of cambric, just Marjorie's size, was placed upon the bed.

Marjorie said her prayers very fervently, indeed, and then lay down in the little bed, which smelled of sweet lavender. Her first day on the other side of that mysterious doorway through which she had so long desired to pass was a wonderful one, and the little girl had many things of which to think. But her mind wandered most of all to her

home, where everything was so humble, but where were her mother and Dick. So that her cheeks were stained with tears as she fell asleep, which shows that riches are not everything in this world, but that home and love are much more. Also, that doing exactly what one pleases and having everything one wants do not constitute happiness. Many a little girl, as well as Marjorie, has learned this lesson, only sometimes they have grown quite big before they know it thoroughly.

CHAPTER XI.

DICK REMEMBERS.

When Miss Lucy returned that evening to her cousin's she was in a high state of excitement, which, however, she carefully suppressed. She had not quite made up her mind whether or no she would tell Marjorie's mother what she had discovered. She found her in Dick's room, so for the moment, at least, there was nothing to be said. Dick was growing stronger, but there was quite sufficient pallor and weakness about him yet to necessitate caution. He was talking quite gayly to his mother, and took some of the fruit which Miss Lucy had brought home with her. He was laughing, too, in a bright, natural manner, which neither Miss Lucy nor his mother had heard since his illness.

The brightness of his look and tone, too, seemed reflected in the mother, who ever

since the receipt of the mysterious letter had visibly improved.

All at once there was a change in the boy. It was as though a cloud had passed over his sensitive face. His near-sighted eyes peered at his mother as he said, in a strange, unnatural voice:

"Mother, why does Marjorie never come to see me? Where is she?"

His mother was too much astonished to answer at once. After a pause Miss Lucy said:

"You have been too ill to see almost any one."

"But now," he said, turning the same anxious gaze on Miss Lucy, "I am better. She should surely come now."

Miss Lucy, composing her countenance, answered in as indifferent a tone as she could:

"Presently, she will come."

"When?" asked the boy. "To-day?"

Miss Lucy shook her head.

"To-morrow?"

"No."

"Mother," said the boy, "*when* will Marjorie come? I am lonesome for her."

The boy's voice was so petulant, his face

and manner began to show such symptoms of excitement, that Miss Lucy hastily interposed:

"Hurry and get strong, and then—"

But Dick's eyes were fixed upon his mother's face, down which two large tears were making their way. "Mother," said Dick, speaking this time with curious calmness, "I remember it all now. Marjorie is not here. I don't think she will ever come. She went through the doorway."

"Now he is raving again," said Miss Lucy.

"And isn't it strange he should go back to the idea of a doorway? Lie still, there's a dear boy," said his mother, soothingly; she, too, thought his mind was wandering, and was alarmed at the idea of a relapse.

"But I am not raving," said Dick. "I am sure she went through the doorway. I remember it all well."

"What doorway?" asked Miss Lucy, who for the first time began to think that the boy really knew something which might help in the discovery of the missing child.

"It's a gray door between two big brick houses trimmed with white," said the boy. "We always wondered what was inside, but

we never saw it open until one day. Then Marjorie said she would go in. I was afraid, but I didn't want to let her go alone. So we both went up to the door, but as soon as we tried to push it open it closed on us. I was glad, but Marjorie said she would come back every day till she found it open again, and would go in."

The mother and Miss Lucy listened with strained, eager eyes to this recital. It was clearly no raving, but a coherent story. Miss Lucy, with the former clue in her mind, caught at it eagerly.

"I think Marjorie went back herself," said Dick. "She didn't take me because, perhaps, she thought it was better not, in case anything happened. She thought there might be money there to help mother."

"Poor little soul!" said her mother. "But, oh, Dick, if she had only told me!"

"Where is this doorway?" asked Miss Lucy. "Could I find it?"

Dick shook his head.

"Not unless you knew just where it was."

He tried to explain, but Miss Lucy could not follow, and both the mother and she saw that Dick was growing tired.

"Don't talk any more," the mother said, "but hurry and get well, and then you will take us to the place. And, dear, I got a letter saying that Marjorie is safe and well."

A wonderful expression came over Dick's face.

"Then it wasn't bad there, after all!" he exclaimed. "Perhaps Marjorie found money!"

But it was the thought that Marjorie was safe and well which seemed to afford the boy great consolation, and a contented look crept into his eyes and he presently fell asleep.

The two women continued to converse together in whispers, as the twilight deepened, its hush broken by the steaming of the kettle below, and Dick's regular breathing near them.

"Did you give that letter to the police?" asked Marjorie's mother.

"Oh, no!" cried Miss Lucy, with nervous haste, as though she would not entertain the suggestion for a moment. "I thought—I thought it was better not."

"So you agree with me, Lucy," said the mother, quietly. "I am glad, very glad, that you have so decided. But have you any special reason for changing your mind?"

"Yes," said Miss Lucy, hesitating. Then she added, after a considerable pause: "It might, after all, be prejudicial to Marjorie, and probably the police wouldn't learn much by it, and—"

She stopped, but the gathering darkness prevented her cousin from seeing the troubled look that came into Lucy's eyes, and the color that rose to her cheeks. Still, it seemed to the listener that there was something unusual in Lucy's voice and manner. She bent forward, and, laying her hand upon her cousin's arm, said deliberately:

"Lucy, you are keeping something from me. You know more than I do. It is the life of my child that is at stake, therefore, you should tell me."

"What can I tell you?" said Lucy, growing pale. "The letter has said all and more than I could say."

"And yet you know or you fear something," persisted Marjorie's mother, who ordinarily the gentlest, least persistent of women, was aroused now into a kind of fierce inquisitiveness. "And, Lucy, I beg of you, for God's sake, to tell me."

"Dear," said Lucy, trying to speak firmly,

"I *know* nothing. I have guessed a good deal, but whether it will help us to find Marjorie I cannot tell. All I can say is that I have a clue."

"And you will not tell me what it is?" asked Marjorie's mother, sadly.

"Of what use would it be?" argued Miss Lucy. "If the clue can be used, I will use it; if not, better not break a long silence, better leave in secrecy what has been so long unrevealed."

"You are talking riddles," said the mother, almost angrily; "but remember, you are playing with a heart that has been nearly broken. And hearts are bad playthings."

Lucy started as if she had been struck.

"Give me time," she said in a low voice. "Not to-night, but some other time, I will tell you everything."

And so afraid was Miss Lucy of being questioned farther that when supper was over she put on her things and went home to the long-suffering Bridget.

Bridget received her with great evident satisfaction, insisted on bringing her a warm cup of tea, with a slice of toast, and having thus attended to her comfort and expressed

her good-will in a dozen little ways, she did Miss Lucy the greatest service of all by returning to the kitchen and leaving her mistress alone with her thoughts. They were the best company just then, Miss Lucy quaintly reflected, for they did not ask questions, nor strive to penetrate mysteries, nor utter themselves aloud. Nor did they ask for light, content to sit in darkness, illumined only by the electric light on the street without and the cold glitter of the stars, to which thought and speech are alike indifferent. Miss Lucy's thoughts had to travel fast and far that night, over time and space and through labyrinths indescribable. And she sat with them far on into the night, bringing them at last to the gray doorway between two white-trimmed brick houses, where they lingered with curious fascination.

CHAPTER XII.

"THE PRETTY CHILD."

APART from her longing for her mother and Dick, Marjorie might have grown weary of her solitude, but that each hour of the day there was something to amuse and interest her. She was reassured as to her mother by the contents of a dainty note which she found one day upon the breakfast table. It read as follows:

"TO THE BIRD IN THE GOLDEN CAGE."

"Your mother knows that you are well and happy. Have no anxiety about her. You shall see her in good time."

Marjorie was surprised and a little frightened to receive this direct communication from the unknown being, who, having closed the doors of the cage upon her, sought to make her imprisonment as pleasant as possible. Of course, it was a great relief to the little girl to know that her mother was no

longer anxious about her, and that she should see her soon. So, from that time forth, she began to enjoy her novel situation much more. Sometimes pretty frocks or hats were placed in her room, or shoes that Cinderella herself might have coveted; so that Marjorie had laid aside the gingham frock and hat of coarse straw. She did not confine herself to the house. The door by which she had first entered stood open all day long, and she could go out and play in the long grass or pick flowers, which grew in wonderful profusion in the garden near by. This garden contained a great variety of flowers, many of which were strange to Marjorie, and it was full of sweet scents, which mingled with the fragrance of various fruit trees, from which Marjorie freely picked whatsoever kind she preferred.

Marjorie discovered one morning a little dog, who came up to her wagging his tail in a friendly way, as if inviting her to a game of romps. After that he was out every morning, and played with her merrily as long as she was out of doors. He always disappeared when she entered the house, and she could never find out where he went.

At first she regarded him as an enchanted dog, but he seemed in no way different from any others of his race, and attached himself to the little girl, as though he were glad to have a companion. He performed many pretty tricks, which Marjorie discovered by degrees, sitting upright to beg for food and jumping over sticks held out to him or through a hoop. Marjorie also amused herself playing with the gold and silver fish in the fountain. She liked to watch them darting about in the clear water. Sometimes she brought out crumbs to throw to them, or poked at them with a stick to make them move the faster.

But that which interested Marjorie most of all was a discovery which she made after she had been some days in this abode of wonders. Almost every day she wandered into some new part of the house, but on a certain afternoon, feeling somewhat aimless, she went upstairs, and walking about the circular gallery, she suddenly perceived a room in which she never had been before. It was so fairy-like in its appointments that Marjorie held her breath. Surely, this must be a part of that enchanted region which in the

days of her infancy she had often pictured to herself. It must be fairyland. She could see at first only a mass of pink and silver, with pretty lace curtains and coverlet, with soft velvet carpet of the palest shade, and exquisite chairs, cushioned in pink and silver. The bed, raised upon a dais, was shaded by curtains of pale pink with silver fringes, falling from a canopy. Over the mantel was the picture of a child, so beautiful that Marjorie exclaimed aloud:

"Oh, what a pretty child!"

The blue eyes, with their tender, dreamy expression, seemed to look into hers, while the hand, extended with one of those pretty, unconscious gestures of childhood, seemed asking for her friendship. Marjorie stood rooted to the spot in admiration; the gleam of that golden hair seemed to fascinate her more than all the beauties of the room. But she presently became accustomed to it and felt a sense of companionship in the portrait, almost as if it had been a real child. After that Marjorie never missed a day in making her way to see "the pretty child."

After the first day there was always some gift for Marjorie laid on the table in front

of the picture, and always accompanied by a dainty slip of paper with the words written upon it in a bold, legible hand:

"From the Pretty Child."

Sometimes these things were of value and Marjorie hesitated about touching them, until the command was given peremptorily:

"The pretty child bids you take what is offered."

On other occasions it was simply some pretty trifle, which pleased Marjorie quite as well. Once it was a box of curious workmanship, which, being opened, contained chocolates. Again, it was a purse, formed of fine filigree, in which were some pieces of gold. A work-basket lined with satin, and furnished with every appliance for work, was followed by a box of drawing and painting materials. In fact, it would take too long to tell all the pretty things which were thus given to Marjorie.

But she loved even better than these gifts to see the pretty child herself, and talk to her as if she had been real. She got into the habit, indeed, of talking out loud, and told the pretty child of all the wonders she had

seen, the plays she had played, and the thoughts which had passed through her mind. One afternoon in particular she told her how lonely she was for Dick and her mother. On her next visit she found with her gift for that day, a necklace of carved beads, the words:

"You will see those you are wishing to see before very long."

One day Marjorie raised the heavy pink curtains which fell over what she believed to be a cupboard, in a far corner of the room. She saw there two heavily carved doors, which seemed to be of ebony. Something in their appearance fascinated her, held her entranced. Dragons were curiously twisted and mingled, till they seemed almost living and invested with a certain malignity. This was a new subject of interest to Marjorie, who stood before them with something of the same feeling she had had in standing outside the gray doorway between the brick houses. She questioned the little girl upon these weird doors, but no answer came from the sweet blue eyes nor the smiling lips. Next day, however, Marjorie found a paper upon which was written:

L of C.

"All life is a mystery. We but explore one, when another meets us, to prepare us for the great mystery beyond."

Marjorie did not understand this very well, but she thought it had something to do with the door, and she told the little girl so. That evening, indeed, she was in a particularly inquisitive mood, and she asked many questions of the portrait. But she finished by crying out to it:

"Oh, pretty child, why won't you come out of your frame and play with me? I would like ever so much to hear you speak!"

Was it fancy, or did the smile on the lips deepen, and was not that a breath, a real human breathing, which Marjorie heard near? She must have been full of fancies that evening, for as she turned hastily she thought that the pink curtains had been parted and that they fell as she looked with a slight, rustling sound. After a moment's hesitation she approached them, but they were still again, and the ebony doors were as immovably closed as ever.

Every day Marjorie's interest seemed to grow in that mysterious room, and yet in all the house it was only there that she felt

nervous at times, and was filled with peculiar fancies. She never imagined that she saw or heard anything in any other part of the dwelling. In fact, she almost wished sometimes that there was some sound. But here it was different. She always had a feeling that *something* was there. Once, as she conversed with her little friend of the picture, it seemed to her that she saw a hand parting the pink curtains. On another occasion she turned round suddenly, with the feeling that something was behind her, and fancied that she saw two human eyes. Marjorie that time remained quite motionless in her fright. The eyes seemed to transfix her, but when she turned her own away for a moment the others had disappeared. She could not at first find courage to shake the curtains, but when she did so there was nothing behind them, and the dragons seemed to glare at her till she was glad to turn away.

"Why do I have so many fancies in this room?" asked Marjorie of the little girl, "and I don't have any in any other part of the house?"

The answer was waiting for her on her next visit:

"Because this room has a soul."

"How could a room have a soul?" Marjorie thought to herself, laughing a little at the notion. But, after all, it was rather frightful, too. Souls were spirits, and perhaps that was the meaning of those strange words. After that she always left that room and said good-by to the pretty child before dark. She did not want to see those two gleaming eyes again, and she was somewhat afraid of the dragons.

CHAPTER XIII.

MARJORIE SEES SOME ONE.

ONE forenoon, when Marjorie entered the pretty child's room, as she called it, she saw what seemed to be a chink of light coming through the pink curtains. She approached cautiously, and perceived that the ebony door was open. The largest of the dragons was parted, as it were, in two, and one eye seemed to regard Marjorie, as she fancied, with a malevolent expression.

She could not at first make up her mind to draw near. She stood irresolute, looking from the smiling face of the child, which inspired her with hope and confidence, to the menacing grimness of the dragon, which held her back. She blessed herself and said a short prayer, as she always did on any important occasion. Then she approached with beating heart, and, looking through the

opening, saw a room which in its perfect plainness was a contrast to all that she had yet seen. It was like the cell of a hermit, and rendered more so by a great carven crucifix and a picture of the Madonna. As Marjorie peered and peered she became conscious that some one was regarding her with fixed attention, and that the two eyes of her fancy were there in reality.

But she soon saw that the eyes were set in the face of a remarkably handsome man. They were of a deep gray, and marked by a great sadness which it was beyond a child's power to comprehend.

"And so," said a voice, which even to one of Marjorie's limited experience seemed peculiarly pleasing, "you are face to face with still another mystery. This time, however, it is a speaking one."

Marjorie was seized with great shyness in this new presence, but the stranger, opening wide the ebony doors, bade her enter and be seated.

"For the time has come," he said, "when I have much to say to you."

Marjorie sat down and stared at the gentleman, who had turned towards the window,

and for a time seemed unconscious of her presence. But such was not the case, for the sight of the childish figure sitting so quietly there filled him with a great emotion. Marjorie felt no fear. The peaceful face of the Madonna and the familiar, sorrowful figure of the Crucified would have reassured her if she did. They were lighted by the windows, exquisitely painted as below and unshadowed by any curtains. A glow falling through them rested on the sacred symbols, as on the laughing faces of the cavaliers and ladies in the drawing-room.

At last the stranger sat down directly facing Marjorie and looked at her fixedly.

"The time has come," he said, "when I have much to say to you, and I shall begin by telling you that long before you were permitted to pass through the doorway I was aware of your desire to do so. I knew of your visits and your brother's to its neighborhood, and at first I believe I rather resented your curiosity. In permitting you to enter at last I foresaw that that curiosity would be sufficiently punished by the event, but I was also actuated by other motives, which shall be presently explained.

"When you, with your brother, found the door open the first time, I closed it absolutely upon him. Had he not mounted the steps beside you that first venture of yours would have succeeded."

He paused, resting his head upon his hand so that a ray from the window fell upon him, showing the gray in his brown hair and the lines of care in his face.

"Now, I was willing to punish your curiosity by that one night of terror, during which, I believe, I suffered almost as much as you. By permitting you to find mystery after mystery, I was actuated by none but kindly feelings towards you. I desired that your experience here should be a pleasant one, for the sake of that other little girl whose picture hangs above the mantelpiece. But I wanted to try you."

"Is—is the little girl here?" asked Marjorie, timidly.

The stranger did not answer directly, but said instead, looking with a very kindly expression into the earnest little face before him:

"You would like to see her?"

"Oh, yes," said Marjorie, "I would like

that best of all. We could play together in this beautiful place."

"She is, I hope, in a more beautiful one," said the stranger. "You will never see her on earth, little Marjorie."

The tears came into Marjorie's eyes and rolled down her cheeks, partly because she was so disappointed, and partly because of the sadness in the stranger's voice, which touched her very much. Those tears won his heart, if it had not been won already.

"I am going to ask you something, Marjorie," he said, in a voice which was almost caressing. "Would it cost you too much to live here and take the place of the little girl who is gone? All this was hers, and it shall be yours if you can be happy here."

For one brief moment the prospect seemed a dazzling one. Then Marjorie answered:

"It is all beautiful, but I couldn't stay, because my mother needs me. We are rather poor, and she has to work very hard. I help her all I can. So does Dick."

The stranger, deeply touched, let his eyes rest upon the chubby hands of the quaint little maiden, as if wondering what work they could do. But he continued:

"We might get some one to do the work for her."

"Oh, but that wouldn't be the same, and she would miss me. So would Dick. Dick is my brother, you know, and we always play together. We don't know any other children. So you see I must go."

"Bravo, little Marjorie!" cried the stranger. "I want to keep you more than ever now. But I see that they would, indeed, miss you at home. So I will take you there and we shall see what can be done."

While Marjorie was thanking the stranger, her face full of joy at the thought of going home, she suddenly began to look intently at him.

"Why do you look at me so strangely, little one?" asked the gentleman, smiling.

"Because I saw you once before," said Marjorie.

"You saw me? Was it in this house?" the stranger asked in surprise.

Marjorie shook her head.

"I mean I saw your picture, and the little girl's was with it. When I looked at the picture in the other room I couldn't remember where I had seen the same face before."

"But where was it?" asked the stranger, curiously.

"At my Cousin Lucy's," answered Marjorie.

"Where?" cried the gentleman, springing to his feet.

Marjorie, alarmed by the movement and the tone of his voice, repeated rather faintly:

"At my Cousin Lucy's."

"What is her other name?" cried the stranger. Marjorie told him.

"My God, how wonderful are Thy ways!" said the man, with a single glance at the crucifix. "That was the likeness which I saw and which attracted me to this child. You are very like your cousin," he continued, addressing Marjorie abruptly, in his effort to master his emotion. "So it was with her you saw my picture?"

"Yes," said Marjorie. "When I went into her room one evening she was sitting at her desk, and your picture was in front of her. But she had the picture of the little girl in her hands, and she was crying over it, so that it was all wet. I noticed that. I stood still, because I didn't want to disturb her, but when she saw me she said: 'Don't mind,

Marjorie. I am with the two people I love best in the world.' "

"She said *that?*" cried the stranger, in great agitation.

Marjorie nodded.

"I remember that evening very well, because Cousin Lucy gave me a doll afterwards."

"But—but I thought, I was told, she had married."

"Cousin Lucy isn't married, I'm sure," said Marjorie. "She just has Bridget."

"Well, well! all that doesn't matter now," said the stranger, going back to his ordinary manner. "I am sorry you are not going to stay with me, but since go you will, I shall order the carriage and take you home. But you must have luncheon first, and I will join you at it in about an hour."

So Marjorie spent that hour in saying good-by to everything, especially to the little girl, and she could not help feeling sorry that she was leaving the beautiful place behind. Only it would be so nice to see her mother and Dick, and to tell them all about it. At luncheon the stranger talked very pleasantly to her, and she soon felt enough

at home with him to ask him questions about things that still puzzled her. She found out that he lived in a wing of the house, which could be completely shut off, when he wished, from the rest. His old housekeeper, who had been the pretty child's nurse, lived there, with several other servants. The mysterious opening and shutting of doors was done by means of electric wires, and he himself had often been near her when she could not see him, especially when she was in the pretty child's room, which communicated with his own apartments. This and much more he told her, at which most children will guess, for they know best what questions they would like to ask in such a case. After luncheon was over Marjorie was told to collect all her things, the gifts which had been given her, while all the pretty frocks, hats and shoes were brought down and placed in the carriage, which presently stood at the door.

Marjorie was instructed to go into the garden and pick a great bunch of flowers for her mother, while a basket containing a quantity of fruit was already in the carriage. So nothing remained but to take her seat beside the stranger. Presently they passed out

through the great gates which Marjorie had once vainly tried to open, and were being whirled along in the direction of her home.

CHAPTER XIV.

COUSIN LUCY'S STORY.

It was some days before Miss Lucy kept her promise of telling Marjorie's mother of the clue which she had found, and with it the story of her past life. The two were sitting together in one of those early twilights which mark the close of summer. They were in the dining-room, which also served as a parlor, and the glow of the kitchen fire shone in pleasantly. After a long pause, during which Miss Lucy's face was thoughtful, even serious, she began her recital as follows:

"You know how spoiled I was as a girl. Being an only child, and my mother dying young, I was idolized by my father, who denied me nothing. All that you remember, and I need not dwell upon it. When I was just twenty years of age I met some one who exercised a marked influence over my life. Probably you have never heard the story, for

you were away from New York at the time; nor after the lapse of years would it be worth the telling now, except in so far as it concerns the present matter. Within one month after our first meeting I was engaged to Bronson Holmes. He was handsome and clever, with a dash of eccentricity and Bohemianism in his character. He was also extremely wealthy. Multi-millionaires were not so plentiful in those days in New York, and his wealth was considered fabulous.

"He was, however, a somewhat indifferent Catholic, which caused my father to look somewhat coldly upon him. But I hoped, with the careless, if enthusiastic, faith of girlhood, to convert him easily. He was a widower with one child, to whom he was devoted in the same manner as my father was devoted to me. She was as sweet and pretty as a fairy, an exquisite little being, of whom I soon became inordinately jealous. For, though I was fond of the child myself, I saw that she occupied a very large place in her father's heart."

Here Miss Lucy stopped, and her cousin, who was sympathetically regarding her, observed that the troubled look deepened in her eyes,

which were fixed upon the crimson line of light coming in from the kitchen fire.

"We had a quarrel because of her, in which I was altogether wrong. To show my power over Bronson I suggested that he send his Elsie away to a convent school. I shall never forget the look of almost fierce resentment which darkened his face as I spoke. But his answer was an absolute refusal.

"Elsie was delicate, he said, and required all the care and comfort of home to keep her alive. Moreover, he added, it augured very ill for Elsie's happiness, or even for his own, if I so early began to desire her absence. I replied with great warmth, and the substance of what I said was that neither Elsie's happiness nor his would ever be endangered by me. I handed him back my engagement ring as I spoke, and with an obstinate pride I held to that resolve, despite every effort on his part to make me reconsider. Indeed, it was only after the breach between us that I fully understood how devotedly he loved me, and that the same intensity of nature which made him cling to Elsie also displayed itself in his attachment to me. Still, I would not yield. He tried

everything which tact and patience could devise to make me change my mind, but in vain."

"Oh, Lucy!" cried her cousin. "Knowing you as I do now, it seems incredible that you could ever have acted in such a manner."

"Youth is always foolish, and prodigal of its blessings," said Lucy, calmly. "But one thing I can thank God for, that Bronson did not yield as regarded Elsie. Had he yielded I should have been full of remorse to this hour, for she died four years from that day. I grieved for her sincerely, and realized then how dear she had become to me. But it was too late. Her charming presence had passed forever out of my life, and with it, apparently, the last trace of affection on the part of my once devoted lover."

"And you regretted, of course?" said Marjorie's mother.

"Not altogether," answered Lucy, quietly. "Had I, with my undisciplined character, married him then the years during which Elsie lived would have been, I fear, a time of constant strife, and perhaps have caused our lifelong unhappiness. So, perhaps things were arranged for the best. Provi-

dence takes care of such matters. But, talking of my grief for the child, I remember once how your poor little Marjorie found me crying bitterly over a child's picture. I think that up to that time Marjorie had supposed big people never cried—you are so patient, dear, she probably never saw you in tears. She looked at me very curiously, and I told her I was crying for the death of a child whom I had very much loved."

"How hard it all was," said Marjorie's mother, as her cousin resumed.

"But I have been keeping you in suspense all this time, and I am sure you are wondering what this has to do with Marjorie's loss. My dear, in reading that remarkable letter which you got the other night a strange suspicion seized me, and as I pondered over it in the silence of my room I found a clue in the form of one or two letters of the handwriting and in the perfume of a sandal-wood box, in which Bronson used to keep his stationery. I had not seen that handwriting for many a long year, but the peculiar formation of those letters came back to me."

Marjorie's mother leaned forward, trembling with excitement.

"And you think?" she asked.

"I do not think; I am sure that Marjorie is in Bronson Holmes' keeping. At first this idea troubled me greatly. It brought back with fearful suddenness the past, in which I had so foolishly, perhaps so criminally behaved, when Bronson had said that I strove to make playthings of human hearts and human affections."

Here Miss Lucy smiled a little bitterly as she went on, and Marjorie's mother listened breathlessly.

"For a time I had a fear that Bronson, always eccentric, had become unsettled in his mind, and that he was keeping Marjorie for the child he had lost. But I very soon dismissed this idea, for the tone of the letter is not that of a lunatic. Again, a still wilder, more unreasonable thought came into my mind, that Bronson had discovered Marjorie's relationship to me, and that this was a scheme of revenge upon his part."

Marjorie's mother clasped her hands.

"Oh, do you think it could be so?"

Miss Lucy laughed.

"No, indeed. I very soon dismissed that conjecture as still wilder than the other.

Bronson was never of a vindictive nature. In fact, he was the gentlest, the most generous, of men, as well as the most honorable, apart altogether from the improbability of such action on his part. So believe me, dear, and be happy in the belief, that Marjorie's detention is merely one of Bronson's eccentric, but benevolent, whims. He means nothing but good to the little girl."

The relief was so great that Marjorie's mother said nothing. Perhaps she was praying, but no audible sound passed her lips.

"But now I must tell you how this theory of mine fits into the story Dick has told of some mysterious doorway which tempted Marjorie. Some years ago I heard a story, which was never confirmed, that Bronson Holmes had built for his daughter and himself in the very centre of New York, but in a somewhat isolated neighborhood, a dwelling of Oriental splendor, and fairy-like beauty in its appointments, where he lived like a hermit, devoting himself entirely to his child and keeping her aloof from the world, which, he said, made girls both hard and selfish. It was from me that he formed that flattering opinion," said Miss Lucy, with the

same half-ironical smile. "This house was spoken of as 'Holmes' Folly.' But I very often doubted its real existence, and was persuaded he had left New York altogether."

Marjorie's mother was so rejoiced at all she had heard, and felt so convinced that it would turn out to Marjorie's advantage, that she thanked her cousin over and over again for having thus raised the veil from her past life, and at the same time taken a load from an overburdened heart.

"How long he will keep Marjorie I cannot say," said Lucy; "but I don't think he will keep her long without letting you see her. He has a very kind heart and, I am sure, must be troubled as it is over the anxiety he has given you. But now, let me help you with the tea, and think no more of this bygone romance. It is old-timey and foolish, and quite unworthy of our nineteenth century common-sense. Besides, my prosaic self is very poor stuff for a heroine."

Marjorie's mother bent and kissed her cousin, while together they bustled about preparing tea. Dick was to be brought down that evening for the first time. Before they went up to fetch him, Miss Lucy said:

"In all this matter, however it may turn out, I must remain absolutely in the background; far better that Bronson should not know Marjorie to be a relative of mine, lest it should interfere with any of his projects concerning her. Besides, with the wisdom of my years and its light on how I acted, I cannot look Bronson Holmes in the face. And I know it would be a great grief to him to meet me and be reminded of everything."

"Your wishes shall be respected," said Marjorie's mother, earnestly.

"How splendid everything is since Cousin Lucy came to live here," said Dick, when they were all at supper.

"I don't really live here, you know," laughed Cousin Lucy.

"Well, you're here a great deal, and mother never looks so tired, and we have nice things to eat and everything, if we only had Marjorie."

Dick wound up with a gulp, which sounded like a sob.

"We will have her, too, before long, please God," said Marjorie's mother, anxious to stop the busy little tongue. "God, Who has

sent us so good a friend, will send back Marjorie, too."

"I hope He will," said Dick, "and soon."

"You remember," went on the mother, "how I used to tell you about the cloud with the silver lining. Marjorie's going away was the cloud; Cousin Lucy's coming, and other things, too, are the silver."

"If I know Bronson Holmes, the lining will be gold, instead."

Miss Lucy said this in a low tone, not meant for Dick; but the boy had sharp ears.

"Who is Bronson Holmes?" he asked, pronouncing the name very distinctly.

"The man who lives inside the mysterious doorway," said Cousin Lucy, by a sudden impulse.

"Oh, do *you* know *him?*" cried Dick, "and is there really a man?"

"I think there really is."

"And is he keeping Marjorie?"

Lucy nodded.

"I knew she went in that door," he said, triumphantly, adding by an after-thought:

"How do you know?"

But that question Cousin Lucy did not answer.

CHAPTER XV.

MARJORIE COMES HOME.

It was on the very day after the conversation between Cousin Lucy and Marjorie's mother that the grand carriage which contained Marjorie and her new friend drove round to the humble door which the little girl knew as home. The stranger, with Marjorie, entered the shabby little sitting-room, into which presently came a pale and trembling woman, who seized Marjorie in her arms, holding her as if she were never going to let her go again.

Very soon, however, she recovered herself and asked the stranger to be seated. So handsome and distinguished-looking was he that he would have seemed out of place in that poor abode, but that his tact and perfect simplicity of manner made it apparent that he cared nothing for the shabbiness and was bent only on putting every one at ease. He began by an apology, very humble and

sincere indeed, to Marjorie's mother for having played such a prank with the little girl. Marjorie's mother, who, despite long years of poverty and privation, was a gentlewoman nevertheless, answered simply and with dignity:

"You caused me great grief, sir."

A look of pain crossed the stranger's face.

"How thoughtless, how cruel, I have been! I can only plead as my excuse that my note to you relieving your anxiety was to have reached you on the very evening of Marjorie's disappearance. I learned this morning that, through the carelessness of a servant, it was delayed for fully two weeks."

"That is sufficient excuse," said Marjorie's mother; "and, since you have brought me great joy now, I must surely forgive you. Besides, it was partly the fault of my little girl's indiscreet curiosity."

Marjorie had flown upstairs to look for Dick, so the stranger said:

"Marjorie has no faults."

"Don't say that, in her hearing especially," said the mother, smiling nevertheless. "She has many a childish fault, though, thank God, no serious ones."

"She is brave, honest, truthful, kind-hearted, quick-witted, and capable of great self-sacrifice," said the stranger, warmly. "Surely, that is a list of qualities of which you may well be proud."

"She has been very much to me," said the mother, tremulously; "more than any stranger can know."

"Will you still forgive me if I tell you that I made an effort to take her from you altogether?"

There was something so winning in the stranger's voice and manner that Marjorie's mother felt it was easy to forgive him anything, and she fell to wondering how Lucy could ever have been so hard where he was concerned.

"I offered to adopt her and give her everything I had if she would only stay as my child, in place of one I had lost. But she would not give you up, nor her brother, to whom she seems also much attached."

A proud light came into the mother's eyes.

"You didn't know Marjorie when you made her that offer," she said, quietly.

"Well, in one sense of the word, I did not

mean it," said the stranger. "Nothing could have been done without your consent, and I should have been disappointed in Marjorie had she consented. So you see what a whimsical being I am," he added, smiling.

Marjorie's mother smiled, too, though she said thoughtfully:

"I begin to understand. You were trying the child. And yet it was a sore trial, too, and in some cases might have been too great for human strength. For you, sir, have never known, I presume, poverty, privation, toil."

The stranger bent his head, as if acknowledging that in this experience the woman before him was his superior.

"No, in those respects," he said, "life has been made, perhaps, too easy for me. They are the real makers of character, and I do believe it is a wise Providence which makes the greater part of mankind experience them."

The smile that crossed the face of Marjorie's mother was, perhaps, a little bitter.

"It is so easy," she was thinking, "for rich people to talk philosophy to the poor."

"Do not misunderstand me," said the stranger, almost eagerly. "I do not under-

rate the pain, the discomfort, the weariness. Only I think that these things, borne with fortitude, gave true nobility to our race. However, I haven't come here to talk on such weighty subjects. I want to see what we can do about arranging a compromise, giving me as much as possible of Marjorie, while leaving her to you and Dick."

While this conversation was going on below, Marjorie had found Dick, and after a joyful greeting on both sides the little girl began to talk.

"Oh, Dick," cried Marjorie, "it was just heavenly inside that doorway, if only you had come!"

She burst into a hurried recital of the principal glories of the place, to which Dick listened with avidity.

"And you know those two brick houses with the white facings?" Marjorie inquired.

"I guess I do," answered Dick.

"Well, they're both empty. Wasn't it ghostly to be near them?"

"What are they for?" asked Dick.

"*He* owns them," said Marjorie, pointing downstairs. "He's down there, you know."

"*Is* he?" cried Dick, with awe.

"He brought me home in a lovely carriage," went on Marjorie. "It's at the door."

Dick, feeble as he was, insisted on going to the window to see it, and having admired it, perceived that the neighbors, especially the children, were of the same mind as themselves, for they had gathered round to gaze at it.

"Why did he keep the houses empty?" asked Dick, taking up the thread of the discourse.

"Oh, because he didn't want people looking out of the window at him. He's very grand and rich, and does what he likes. He's kind, too, and he wasn't angry at me at all for coming in at his door. Oh, Dick! such things as he gave me, and some of them are for you."

"Where are they?" cried Dick, eagerly.

"They're in a big box downstairs," said Marjorie, "a trunk just full of things."

"I wish you could get them out now," said Dick.

"I can't till he's gone," said Marjorie.

"His name's Bronson Holmes," said Dick, pronouncing the name very distinctly as before.

"How do you know?" asked Marjorie, in astonishment.

"Cousin Lucy told me," said Dick.

Marjorie pondered this a moment, a smile breaking over her face as she remembered all about the picture she had seen on Cousin Lucy's desk. Dick, reminded by the mention of Miss Lucy's name, now began his story.

"Except for you being gone, it's been just splendid here," he said. "I was very sick."

"That wasn't very nice," said Marjorie. "Oh, Dick, were you very, very ill?"

"Yes; they thought once I was dying, but I didn't know," said Dick. "Cousin Lucy lived here nearly all the time, and she helped mother; and she gave me lots of nice things to eat and to play with."

"I'm so glad," said Marjorie. "And, Dick, perhaps he'll let you go in the mysterious doorway some day."

"I wish he would," said Dick, wistfully; "but we couldn't ask him, could we, Marjorie?"

"Perhaps I could," said Marjorie, a little proudly. "I know him pretty well now, and rather long, too, because I knew him before

I saw him. I want you to see the little girl, Dick; she's lovely."

"Does she live in the doorway?" asked Dick, somewhat vaguely.

"No, because she's dead; but her picture is there, and—"

Marjorie's narrative was cut short, as she was called down to see the stranger before his departure.

CHAPTER XVI.

CONCLUSION.

THE children often go inside the mysterious doorway and their mother is a frequent visitor there as well. A lady lives in the wonderful house, who is so remarkably like Cousin Lucy that this might have been held to be another of the marvels of the place, had not mother and children attended a quiet wedding one morning at the parish church near Miss Lucy's home. The bride was some one that they knew very well indeed, and the groom bore a strong resemblance to that mysterious personage whom Marjorie had first seen as she peeped through the doors of carved ebony.

That particular marvel had, indeed, been very simply accomplished. The stranger had asked Marjorie to bring him to see her Cousin Lucy. One quiet evening, as Miss Lucy sat once more under the glitter of the

stars, thinking, Bridget came to tell her that Miss Marjorie was below with a gentleman. A deadly paleness came into Miss Lucy's face and a strange tightening at her heart. But in a few minutes more she was resolutely going down the stairs, without one trace of discomposure about her.

Bridget had carried off Marjorie into the regions of the dining-room and pantry, where she made much of the lost and found one.

Miss Lucy and the stranger met as two well-bred people will, no matter what the emotions which the sight of each other awakens, especially when time has taught them self-control and the art of outward composure. But the emotion on either side, if repressed, was deep, and they went back over all those years of their lives to rectify, as far as possible, their mistakes.

So, instead of Marjorie, it was Miss Lucy who went to live at "Holmes' Folly." But the children both might almost as well have lived there, they went so often and stayed so long; never did they grow weary of the beautiful things with which the place was overflowing. There was always some new in-

terest and amusement, just as the owner of that wonderful abode and his wife found an ever new delight in unravelling the mysteries of the past.

At first there had even been question of mother and children going to live there, but Marjorie's mother insisted that it was better they should remain in their own little house. It was very comfortable now, though, for Mr. Holmes had insisted on carrying out his original intention of adopting Marjorie, at least to the extent of paying for her education and all other expenses, and of making her a handsome allowance. He declared that he was doubly anxious to do this now, as Marjorie had bee ı instrumental in bringing back his happiness. Miss Lucy had, thereupon, declared that Dick must not be altogether out of the arrangements, and that, as she had helped to bring him back to life, *she* would take care of him and make *him* an allowance. The mother would accept nothing directly for herself, but she had, in fact, everything through the children.

"Holmes' Folly" soon lost much of its air of mystery. "Miss Lucy," as Bridget, who was also transplanted there, persisted in call-

ing her, counteracted whatever was morbid or visionary in her husband. She insisted upon hearty and wholesome intercourse with friends and neighbors, and did away, as far as possible, with needless secrecy. The brick houses with the white facings were rented, losing thus their ghostly appearance.

Husband and wife were both devout Catholics by this time. After many wanderings about the world Bronson Holmes had learned that religion is, after all, true happiness. In his piety, it is true, there was a touch of the mysticism which belonged to his character, and to which, perhaps, his long sojourn in the East had contributed. Miss Lucy's was of the practical, and yet enthusiastic, type; so that "the Folly" became, indeed, a "House of Wisdom," noted as a centre of good works. And the children became the ministers in a great variety of charities. Their aid was sought, and they were permitted to have a share in all that was going on.

Thanks to their mother, the old home life was, however, still preserved amid all the changes. Dick and Marjorie still played together as of yore. Marjorie joined in all Dick's games, and shared in all his studies.

And the mother still held her firelight talks with them, or read to them from a constantly increasing store of books.

"How much happiness came from poor little Marjorie's venture," said Cousin Lucy, thoughtfully, to her husband, "indiscreet and foolish as it was."

"I shall always love Marjorie," said Bronson, "if I hadn't begun to do so when she was my solitary guest."

There was no tinge of jealousy in the smile with which Lucy greeted this declaration.

"I love her, too; and Dick also, whom I helped to nurse back to life."

And the mother, who sat with the children in the light of the kitchen fire, which still warmed and illumined the little sitting-room, said gratefully:

"Yes, Marjorie, dear, and Dick, a great deal of happiness has come to us all through the Mysterious Doorway."

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